

## **The Hopper Family Zoo by darthstormer**

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**Summary:** "Jane Ellen Hopper! Why is there a raccoon in the kitchen?" Chief Hopper has to confront his daughter's latest obsession: rescuing every homeless animal that crosses her path. A Hopper-Family one-shot

## **The Hopper Family Zoo**

"Jane Ellen Hopper! Why is there a raccoon in the kitchen?"

Jim Hopper bellowed the question down the hall toward his daughters room, never taking his eyes off the tiny bandit sitting in a cardboard box on the counter. Eleven had fallen into a serious habit of bringing home every stray and abandoned animal she came across. In recent months, the Hopper household had begun to feel more like a zoo than a home.

It had started innocently enough with a yellow lab named Buster whom they adopted from the county animal shelter. Dr. Owens had suggested that a dog might be beneficial in controlling Eleven's nightmares and thankfully, he had been right. His warm presence at the foot of her bed worked to keep the bad dreams at bay most nights. On nights when the dreams did find their way through, the dog picked up on her distress and would curl up in her arms, effectively putting her mind at ease once more. Hopper was initially skeptical about another mouth to feed and look after, but Buster quickly proved his worth, helping his little girl continue to heal.

Next came a ginger-furred cat named Thomas. Eleven was madly in love with her VHS copy of *The Aristocats* and had begged Hopper to a kitten. He had successfully put it off for a while, until the day they went grocery shopping and there was a box out front marked 'Kittens, Free to a Good Home.' It had been all he could do to keep her from trying to haul home the entire box. He was a little concerned how Buster would take to having a cat around the house, but the two had quickly gotten used to each other and could now be found most afternoons curled up together on Eleven's bed. Hopper had never considered himself a cat person but he had to admit, he didn't mind too much when the fluffy beast decided to curl up in his lap while he read the morning paper.

The most recent addition was Sir-Speedy, the overactive hamster. A friend from school was moving and wouldn't be able to take her pet along and Eleven had been all too eager to adopt the homeless critter. Hopper had wanted to tell her no, that they had enough pets to take care of, but Eleven had recently learned the ancient, secret art

of "Please, Daddy?" eyes. She had him wrapped tight around her finger and they both knew it. Still, he had to put a firm foot down at three animals; Sir-Speedy was it. No more pets.

"Jane?" he hollered again.

Moments later, the girl poked her head around the corner and tried to put on her most innocent, sweet smile. "Yes, Daddy?"

"What is this?" he asked, nodding toward the tiny raccoon nibbling on a slice of lunch meat.

"I found him out in the yard. He looked hungry and scared," she explained, knowing it was probably a losing battle.

"What did we talk about?" he countered. "No wild animals in the house."

"What about Mr. Tweets?" she shot back, hoping she had found a flaw in his argument.

Hopper sighed; he had forgotten about Mr. Tweets. Before Thomas had come along, Eleven had found a sparrow hobbling about the yard. The little bird had injured its wing crashing into the living room window. While Hopper had wanted to let nature take its course with the bird, Eleven's tender heart had won him over. She couldn't bear seeing anyone or anything suffering without trying to help in whatever way she could. In the end, he had relented and let her care for the injured bird. They had taken a large cardboard box and covered the top with an old window screen. She collected grasses from out in the yard and built it a crude nest in one corner and placed tiny dishes of water and birdseed in another. For a week, she had spent every free moment next to the box, watching with fascination as the bird hopped about his tiny recovery space, softly whispering encouragements when she thought Hopper wasn't listening.

At the end of the week, her little patient was flitting about the box, stretching his wings and showing all the signs of being ready to return to nature. It had broken Hopper's heart to watch her tearfully set the bird free in the backyard once more. He had gathered her in

his arms as they watched Mr. Tweets fly off over the lake and tried his best to gently explain that wild animals weren't meant to be kept in houses and belonged free out in nature. She quietly nodded her agreement, but still spent the remainder of the evening curled up sadly on the couch with Buster nestled at her side.

"Mr. Tweets was a special case," Hopper responded much more gently, recalling her deeply ingrained need to help.

"I know, but..." she began, before he cut her off.

"And we agreed, wild animals belong outside, right?"

"Yes." she agreed, her face suddenly falling. "I don't think he has a family. Or a home," she added, looking down at the ball of fur wrestling playfully with his lunch.

A tear fell down her cheek and Hopper understood just what had drawn her to this latest find. She had spent the better part of her life caged and longing for a home and family, not even knowing what those things were. Now, her heart broke for everyone and everything in that same condition. He had lost track of how many stray cats, and a few lost dogs, had wandered across their property that she had tried to convince him to let her keep.

Hopper reached out and pulled her into a hug.

"Well, he can't stay in the house. But we can make him a spot out under the porch, and if he decides he wants to stay, he can stay. How's that sound?" Hopper offered.

She looked up into his eyes with a grateful smile. "Thank you."

And that is how the Hopper family zoo got Bandit the raccoon. Instead of wandering off back into the woods, he opted to take up permanent residence in his old wooden crate under the porch. He fended for himself when it came to food and even kept small rodents at bay, so Hopper had to reluctantly admit he was a reasonably harmless addition to the family. Still, the Chief put his foot down firmer than ever, stating that four was it, they couldn't take in another animal. Eleven agreed. For now.